

Bilingualism in Education

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Abstract—The article deals with the issue of bilingualism in education and highlights the significance of this linguistic phenomenon in the process of education. As knowledge of foreign languages is the key priority for any individual in the modern world, bilingualism, even multilingualism is supported in Azerbaijani system of education as well as in any country in the world. Considering great challenges learners face in the process of second language acquisition, there should be organized way for realization of bilingual education without damaging their linguistic psychology.

Index Terms—bilingualism, bilingual individuals, education, language acquisition, structured immersion, submersion, language awareness, language skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of foreign languages is becoming one of the most significant requirements on the modern stage of the development of the system of education in any country in the world. It is the result of constant reforms and innovations in the sphere of education caused by scientific, political and economic changes taking place in the modern society as education serves to integration of nations to the world community and promotes to the solution of many global problems. Consequently, to achieve better results in modern science and technology, transition to bilingual education is inevitable and even in some cases crucial in the system of education.

Bilingualism gives a unique opportunity for cross-cultural communication between nations, promotes to mutual understanding and expands the individuals' outlook, makes them more aware of the processes taking place in the modern world, more humanistic and open-minded. Azerbaijan is not exclusion in this field. Bilingual education in Azerbaijan is one of the effective ways of teaching and learning which ends up with comprehensively developed individuals.

II. BILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION

We can speak about bilingualism even if there are a few bilingual individuals in the society focused in some part of the country, the amount of which might vary from small to a greater number. (Tej K. Bhatia, William C. Ritchie, 2006)

Educational aspect of bilingualism is of special significance in modern society in the period of globalization and serious changes taking place in the dynamic and developing world. Educational factor in bilingualism is not less actual in Linguistics. In the XXI century, when bilingual education is practiced in many countries of the world and the number of bilingual individuals is constantly growing, we observe gradual increase in requirements for teaching foreign languages in pre-school, secondary and tertiary education.

The role of the language in secondary education is shown as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills, also promotes to the development of thinking, at the same time the language is a subject and the aim of studying. (The problem of bilingualism and multilingualism., 1972) It is indisputable that the role of the mother tongue is irreplaceable in the function of knowledge and skills' acquisition since the individual learns, acquires new information and thinks in Language 1 already having had some definite language skills. When it comes to the learning of the foreign language, the individual mobilizes the whole potential for acquiring absolutely new theoretical and practical skills, characteristic to Language 2 which was unfamiliar before.

The cases when the pre-school children hardly speak Language 2 and parents enforce them to study, to get education in Language 2 are especially challenging both from educational and psychological points of view. Baker C. (2006) analyzing the case with the children of immigrants in the USA focuses on acquiring English language skills and finds learning English in the shortest period of time like one year "unrealistic" and even "damaging" for the learners. He fairly separates communication skills (on colloquial level) from academic English used in the English language classroom which implies challenging phrases, scientific terminology. Consequently, before studying in a foreign language, any bilingual individual should be competent in the language of education. For example, many Azerbaijani parents enforce their children to study in foreign language schools without any background language preparation. In such cases the process of learning is often ineffective, regardless of the development of cognitive skills and it leads to serious psychological complications even to the inferiority complex. In order to avoid such situations before choosing the language of education it is crucial to make sure that your child has a good command of the language, is able to express ideas and perceive the incoming information effectively. Besides the preliminary language background, learners' motivation which directly affects their beliefs about learning a foreign language in bilingualism is also significant. Studying motivational differences between monolinguals and bilinguals in the context of English as a

foreign language Rayhangul Ayat (2014) reveals major reasons for learning English for successful career, academic development “to act as a global citizen”.

The similar cases are observed in the United States of America, which is the country of immigrants and children from different countries and cultures have to study in American schools without any background of speaking English. Of course, the direct language environment is useful for quick adjusting to a foreign language atmosphere. However, “structured immersion”, that is exposing of the child to English with a language teacher works better rather than “submersion” which implies a foreign language environment without any support to the learner. (Tiersma P., 2010)

In Azerbaijan children belonging to the families of ethnic minorities living on the territory of our country – lezghins, talishes, avars, tats and others, experience such difficulties. Being the native speakers of their mother tongue (Lezghin, Talish, Avar, Tat, etc), such children face serious challenges studying at Azerbaijani or Russian language schools. To avoid such obstacles before starting school a 6 year-old pre-school child should definitely get in the appropriate Azerbaijani or Russian language environment for minimum 1 or 2 years to feel confident and perceive knowledge and skills in the language of education.

According to the ALA website ‘Language Awareness can be defined as explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use’. (www.lexically.net/ala.htm) These requirements can easily be met in the process of teaching and learning interactively. A professional language teacher creates both learning and real-life language environment during the lesson to give the learners an opportunity to be exposed to the target language as much as possible and communicate using a foreign language a lot.

L.V.Sherba (1972) attached great importance to the mother tongue of the bilingual learner, considering that schoolchildren understand the meaning of the new word or language phenomena only in case when they find corresponding equivalents for them in their native language. We can agree with this view point regarding to the learning on lower levels of education, in primary classes. With the increase of the level of learning in Language 2 the necessity of making parallels with Language 1 gradually decreases, even disappears. After acquiring skills and abilities of independent thinking in the language of education by the bilingual learner, the ability to perceive the incoming information becomes direct. As a result of it, bilingual personalities are formed, that is very important in education and provides them with wide access to the heritage of the world culture, science and history.

R.C.Gardner’s (1985) approach to the second language acquisition is also related to the process of education and implies that his “socio-educational model” of the language acquisition is realized in a specific “cultural context”. It means that the process of the second language acquisition is affected by the particular beliefs of the corresponding community as well as individual abilities of learners.

Talking about bilingualism in education it is necessary to note the fact that education received by the bilingual individual is automatically perceived in two languages as the bilingual has one consciousness. It means that knowledge perceived in one language can be easily applied in the other language community when communicating in Language 2. This advantage enriches the bilingual individual’s life experience and increases his or her competency.

Taking into consideration the significant role of bilingual education in the system of education of the country, linguists summarize its following aims:

- 1) language unification and integration by means of the language;
- 2) bilingualism and dual culture;
- 3) achievement of mutual understanding and harmony between different language groups existing in the country;
- 4) promotion of the learners’ culture and increasing of their social and professional opportunities;
- 5) an opportunity to receive knowledge which the national learner is not able to provide;
- 6) providing the learners an opportunity to master the foreign language perfectly so that they could teach it and extend their professional chances on the international level. (Ciguan M., Manni U.F., 1990).

The above mentioned aims serve to the progressive development of the society and they are actual in the modern world of the integration of nations to the world community that motivates the individuals to bilingualism and bilingual education.

In modern Azerbaijan the citizens of the country have freedom of choice in the language of education. They are offered the choice between four languages of education: Azerbaijani, Turkish, English and Russian. However, in any case knowledge of the official language is compulsory. All necessary conditions for bilingual education and formation of the bilingual personality are provided in the country.

Based on the above mentioned facts, we can state that education strongly promotes to the development of bilingualism and promotes to the formation of comprehensively developed and educated bilingual individuals.

Thus, bilingualism is an actual issue both for linguists and methodologists in the sphere of teaching languages.

Relying upon the experience of working with the students (having Azerbaijani and Russian education) studying French, Azerbaijanian linguist B.Ismayilov (2013) claims that, for the best mastering of the foreign language (in this case French) using of similar and different features between languages that the student masters and a foreign language, works really well and considers the following methods of teaching French quite effectively:

- a) using of Azerbaijani for students studying in Russian and learning French on the phonetic level in assimilation of the sounds [f], [e],[c],[d];

- b) on the lexical level using of the words characteristic to Roman languages which exist in Russian for students studying in Azerbaijani language;
- c) on syntactical level in the same groups of students while teaching defining subordinate clauses;
- d) Cultural Linguistics;
- e) getting over the cases caused by the phenomena of interference also positively influence teaching the target language on condition of using significant amount of comparisons.

The above mentioned criteria are based on F.de Saussure's Theory. While learning a foreign language on later stages the individual has already got the fixed speech model of the native language which helps to compare the features of the target language with the mother tongue and to remember new phonemes, morphemes, grammatical structures, lexemes characteristic to Language 2.

From educational point of view the role of a foreign language teacher in mastering of Language 2 is great. The teacher has to motivate the students, generate interest and give the proper direction, not to complicate, vice versa to simplify the process of mastering a foreign language.

In the XXI century, when the knowledge of languages in the sphere of education is just necessary, at secondary schools and higher educational institutions there is a great demand for highly qualified and trained specialists teaching foreign languages using more effective and modern methods of teaching. Very often we witness the fact that some learners are taught a foreign language during 10 or 11 academic years, however, by the time of finishing secondary school they do not have the required skills of communicating in the target language.

Undoubtedly, it is very challenging to achieve equal success of mastering language skills for all learners as every learner has individual language abilities. Even in such cases it is possible to define every learner's learning style: audio, visual or kinesthetic styles, and to plan the lessons taking into consideration their psychological features accordingly, to design appropriate exercises suitable to the learners' learning styles.

We often claim that despite continuous learning of a foreign language both at comprehensive secondary and high schools of our country still the learners do not have a good command of the foreign language and find it challenging to communicate in a foreign language environment. Consequently, teachers of a foreign language besides linguistic aspect of teaching a language should focus on teaching how the foreign language functions in the context of interpersonal and intercultural communication. That is, how the native speakers use it in real life situations for effective communication considering cultural features of the target language country. As a result the learners acquire sociocultural competency that is important for their fluent and spontaneous communication in the foreign language.

If the teacher of a foreign language creates appropriate social, psychological pedagogical and necessary language environment at the lessons of a foreign language and uses effective methods of teaching, the process of learning Language 2 is realized in positive, friendly and "involuntary" language atmosphere that sooner or later will result in successful learning a foreign language. Only on condition if the learners have communication skills, understand and express their thoughts and feelings in the target language, we can speak about bilingualism in education. As the language of education is the source of acquiring necessary information, transmission and perception of knowledge. Without the above mentioned processes education is just not realized.

Today there is a right number of bilingual schools in Azerbaijan with education in Russian and English. In the north of Azerbaijan in Kusal region reside Lezghins, minor ethnic groups belonging to Caucasian ethnicities. In comprehensive schools of these regions, where the education is in Russian, one more extra subject is included in the curriculum – Lezghin language for children from Lezghin families. In such cases bilingualism is replaced by multilingualism as in the family children communicate in their native Lezghin language, in society they speak Azerbaijani which is the official language in Azerbaijan, at school the language of education is Russian.

It is practically impossible to arrange secondary schools, what is more, higher educational institutions for the representatives of minor ethnic groups as the number of learners is not quite enough to create such conditions. In such cases much depends on language environment of those individuals in the family and at school.

In the family with their parents such children, undoubtedly, communicate in their native language. At school for maintaining the equal level of Azerbaijani and Russian languages much depends on the teachers, how effectively they accustom such children to logical thinking, develop their critical thinking and create bilingualism.

For the last years, as it was mentioned before in Kusal region of the Azerbaijan Republic and in some villages, densely populated with Lezghins, Lezghin language is included in school curriculum, the learners are taught to read and write in their native language. This fact gives a unique opportunity to Lezghin children to study their native language and to pass their culture, history and language from generation to generation.

From the point of view of educational aspect bilingualism is successfully developing in Azerbaijan. Since the affiliation of the system of education of the Azerbaijan Republic to Bologna process, education in higher educational institutions in our country is conducted in English. The students who master the English language start studying from the first course of the higher educational institution, those who have difficulties with the foreign language improve their language skills on preparation courses.

Blanchet, P (2006), for example, is against the idea that acquiring new language skills is a "rare talent" characteristic to special individuals. So, any language can be acquired in the process of teaching and learning in the language

environment. Svalberg, A. M. (2007) attaches important role to classroom interaction irrelevant of being structured or informal in the area of Language Awareness research.

Ruilan Zhao (2015) also highlights collaborative learning among multilingual TESOL graduate students and in his research shows that educating in a foreign language interactively promotes to students' academic development.

Although there are opinions against bilingual education which claim that bilingual education is costly or it promotes minority language speakers to give up their own language or culture (www.sitemaker.umich.edu/137014) we can hardly agree with that because later when individuals finish school or graduate from University and realize that knowledge of minimum one foreign language is unavoidable in the modern world, they have to spend much more expenditures to acquire foreign language skills rather than they would have learnt it at an earlier age more effectively.

Concerning the loss of language and culture, we suppose that if a bilingual individual lives in his or her native country the chances to give up national features will surely reduce. Even in foreign countries there are special communities, embassies where bilingual individuals can be aware of their national language and cultural values.

One of the advantages of bilingual education is academic achievement and enhancing many spheres of knowledge that is challenging for monolinguals. (The Bilingual Education Controversy: A Road map //moramodules.com/Prop 227/BERoadmap.htm). Knowledge of an additional language provides good foundation for successful future career and gives opportunities for further education in advanced educational institutions. So, nowadays not only highly-developed, but also developing countries support bilingual education.

Undoubtedly, bilingual education has its challenges as well. Bilingual individuals face certain difficulties until they master the L2 on the required level. Porter R.P. (1990) even suggests that bilingual learners should be taught basic subjects in their own language, not in English. Rossel, C. and Baker, R. (1996) in their research prove that "structured immersion", a special program for non-English speaking learners where they are taught separately and given instructions in English in an accessible way for them is much more effective than submersion, "sink or swim" principle when limited English-proficient students are placed in a regular English-speaking class.

To compare the learners who were exposed to foreign language before attending secondary school and those who got in a foreign language atmosphere by the principle "sink or swim", we explored the language background of the Azerbaijani children starting secondary school in their first year of education in Russian and English departments and observed their language awareness during the initial period of adaptation approximately for two months. Those who studied in Russian department were the learners of school number 212 situated in Baku, first graders whose parents chose English as the language of education were the learners of private Baku Special Talents' School as secondary education in English is provided only by private educational institutions in Azerbaijan. In both classes there were children of mixed language background: those who had a foreign language preparation with the tutor in the appropriate language environment and those who spoke only their native language – Azerbaijani.

The first month was just the period when the children got familiarized with school environment, their new classmates, and their first school teacher. For many of them, even for those who were absolutely incompetent in Russian or English languages, the atmosphere at school was attracting, interesting and very different from what they used to have at the kindergarten. Starting from the second month, we observed their academic progress. Approximately 20% of the children who faced their language of education for the first time at school showed very low rate of academic performance in comparison with those who were previously exposed to Russian or English languages. By the end of the second month their parents even were not able to enforce them to go to school. Children started ignoring school and had very negative associations with school and the learning process. Eventually, they absolutely refused to attend school and study. The rest 80% showed very intensive and successful academic progress as a result of language awareness and background preparation and were willing and enthusiastic to learn new information in Russian or English.

To prevent such undesirable and disastrous effect, children without any appropriate language skills to study in a foreign language should either be prepared for such psychological experiment in advance or separated from the more competent ones for some period of time not to cause serious psychological problems and neglect to education in general.

In our opinion, "structured immersion" is more beneficial for learners without any pressure or damage to their language psychology and encouraging to study in a foreign language environment not overloading them. This technique would work very well if in some foreign language schools the basic subjects were taught in learners' native language and gradually replaced by English.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention that education plays the enormous role in the development of bilingualism and it is an important criterion in the formation of bilingual personality, his outlook and intellectual level.

Very often the language in which the bilingual individual educated, accompanies in all spheres of his life, and in some cases even dominates in the consciousness of the bilingual individual as during studying logical thinking is formed, which directly affects the consciousness of the bilingual individual, thinking in the language of education.

It is indisputable that knowledge of minimum one foreign language in the modern globalizing world is crucial. The phenomenon of bilingualism has many aspects. Educational aspect is one of the actual ones in the XXI century.

Bilingual individuals who have a chance to study in a foreign language have wider outlook, more cultural awareness and they are more outgoing which is essential nowadays. What is more, bilingual individuals educated in a foreign language have more career opportunities and can work in many other countries.

However, bilingual education has its challenges as well. Unless it is realized in proper conditions, it may damage the learners' psychology and lead to serious negative consequences.

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